



Nursing Assistant Graylin Hillman (left), Cynthia Rucker, assistant nurse manager and Patricia Wilson, clinical nurse specialist, comfort a patient during rounds recently at the Atlanta VA Medical Center.

Their hands touch the lives of veterans; patients are healed by the care nurses give

Nurses are multitasking individuals with unique skills, many that are transferable into other areas of healthcare. It was hard to disguise their many talents during National Nurses Week.

National Nurses Week is celebrated annually from May 6, also known as National Nurses Day, through May 12, the birthday of Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing.

This year's Nurses Week theme was "Nurses: Building a Healthy America."

At the Atlanta VA Medical Center, in addition to a week of continuing educa-

tion and staff promotional events, nurses on staff used the observance as a platform to create a healthy organization through transformation of self and systems.

"What better way to celebrate Nurses Week than making a change to improve the health of not only ourselves, but also the veterans we serve and their families," said Sandy Leake, Associate Director for Nursing and Patient Care Services.

"We are also using the week as a way to celebrate the profession of nursing

and the contribution each nurse makes to ensure the overall hospital team provides the best care anywhere," Leake stated.

Nurses work in acute care and primary care medical specialties, community-based clinics, homeless shelters and community living centers, just to name a few. "We have many roles – from staff nurse to educator to nurse practitioner and nurse researcher – and serve all of them with passion for the profession and with a strong commit-

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Blessing of the Hands Ceremony

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has one of the largest cadres of nurses of any health care system in the world. Numbering more than 75,000 nationwide, (848 of them at the Atlanta VA Medical Center) the VA nursing team — composed of registered nurses, licensed practical nurses/licensed vocational nurses, and nursing assistants — provides comprehensive, complex, and compassionate care to the nation's veterans, helping them to prevent, maintain, and regain health, and to live with disabilities.

Two years ago the Atlanta VAMC started a tradition of anointing the hands of the nursing staff during a small ceremony, including prayer, music and a time of reflection.

This year nearly 100 practioners participated.



Photos by Peter Grattan

Tom Badger (left) Eucharistic Minister, and Chaplain Resident Adriane McGee anoint the hands of nurses during the ceremony held May 6 in the hospital chapel.



Above, Sandy Leake, Associate Director for Nursing and Patient Care Services, addresses the audience of nurses and hospital employees in attendance.

The ceremony was one of many activities recognizing nurses. This year's Nurses Week theme was "Nurses: Building a Healthy America." This theme reflects the dual characteristics of nursing as an art and a science — a profession that requires clinical expertise, technical skill and compassion.



As part of the ceremony, audience members cupped their hands in unison for prayer: "Our Mother and Father remind us daily of the sacredness of all life. Touch our hearts, minds and bodies as we touch

others. May our lives be a blessing to others as we strive to respect all the living beings on this planet. Consecrate our souls with the beauty of this earth, as we attune ourselves to the rhythm and flow of the seasons."

Volunteers prove vital to patient care, satisfaction

Rodrick Smith
Contributing writer

Volunteers are one of our nation's most cherished natural resources and giving of oneself provides an opportunity to change people's lives, including your own.

"The volunteers at the Atlanta VA Medical Center provide many important functions throughout the medical center," said Voluntary Service Assistant Beth Taylor-Solano, "and many of our veterans have come to depend on the 1,043 unpaid helpers for an improved quality of life, while they are patients in our facilities."

Chief of Voluntary Service Mary Lou Pittman explains, "Many volunteers are veterans themselves. They served this country in places such as World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War and Iraq. Now they are serving again, reaching out to fellow veterans in need." If you'd like to support the heroes, but can't afford to donate money, you can donate your time instead.

So how do you go about it?

Find what's right for you. Volunteering isn't like school; instead of having the choices made for you about where to go and what subjects to learn, you get to choose. The goal is to meet the needs of our veterans, while meeting your interests and talents as a volunteer. There are no special skills required and volunteers can start at age 18.

After you've discovered what interests you, decide how much time you want to spend and what fits into your schedule. "Any time volunteers can give to our veteran is valuable, Taylor-Solano explained. "We do ask for a minimum time commitment from our volunteers and you can stop by our office and design your own schedule.

Expand your mind. Volunteering is a great way to learn new skills — from working as part of a team to setting and reaching goals. A volunteer job that you love can even help shape your ideas about your career goals.

Feel good. Volunteering helps people feel they make a difference — that they do have the power to change things for the better. Volunteering can also cure boredom, Taylor-Solano said. It gives people a place to be where they can have a good time and keep busy.



Atlanta VA Medical Center volunteers and members of the Jewish War Veterans of the USA pose for pictures with residents of the Eagles Nest Community Living Center during a recent outing. Veteran Service Organizations, 32 of which are represented at the medical center, provide support throughout the year. Last year alone, volunteers contribute 86,860 hours of service and donated more than \$581,624 in monetary and non-monetary contributions support of the veterans. Their service also saved the hospital more than \$1.5 million in potential salary expenditure.

"The volunteers here bring an abundance of compassion, energy and spirit to the patients and veterans," Pittman affirmed. "They play a critical role in the success of the medical center. All they need to do is come in and sign up."

How does one sign up to be a volunteer?

- Potential volunteers can visit the Voluntary Service Office located on the first floor in room 1C-158, Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. until 3 p.m. to get the application process started.

- Complete the volunteer application and meet the criteria to volunteer. Once selected, an appointment will be scheduled for an interview.

- Fingerprinting and a background check may also be required depending on the assignment.

- Take a TB test is required and will be scheduled through our Occupational Health office. Bring the documented medical results back to the Voluntary Service Office.

- An orientation video training on privacy and safety will be provided for the volunteer to watch.

"We look forward to meeting new volunteers and having them serve our veterans," Pittman said. "Their decision to volunteer at the Atlanta VA will be very fulfilling and rewarding."

For more information, call the Atlanta VA Medical Center Voluntary Service Office staff at ext. 3217.

"Discover why some of the richest people in the world are not millionaires, they are volunteers."

-- Jobail Brcelona

Regional recruiters help disabled vets find jobs within Department of Veteran Affairs

Robin Brown
Editor

With today's economic challenges, many people are looking for work. One advantage veterans have is there's help available, especially for those seeking employment within the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA).

Nearly 200,000 servicemembers separate from the military to reenter the civilian workforce each year. As an initiative to continue supporting and honoring the service of heroes, the department established the Veteran Employment Coordination Service (VECS). The VECS staff helps to attract, recruit and assist in the hire of veterans into VA, particularly the most severely injured servicemembers returning from deployments.

“ ... That's our hardest hurdle: self evaluation. ”

-- Dr. Annette Taylor

The VECS program was established in 2008 and offers 10 regional offices to advocate on behalf of veterans. It provides a host of hands-on services to assist those seeking employment in the VA; help them avoid many of the common mistakes applicants make when applying for Federal employment; assist veterans in measuring existing competencies by assessing military occupational qualifications, skills and experience; and serve as coaches, case managers and one-on-one peer counselors to assist them in adjusting to their new work environment.

Veterans comprise approximately 30 percent of VA's 287,000 employees, and 8 percent are service-connected disabled veterans, according to the VA Web site. The VA also ranks first among non-defense agencies in the hiring of disabled veterans, second only to the



Dr. Annette Taylor, left, Regional Veterans Employment Coordination Service coordinator, talks with John Walker Jr., a Human Resources specialist at the Atlanta Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center, about potential VA employees during a recent meeting.

Department of Defense in overall number of veterans.

The most frequent question human resource specialists hear from applicants is, 'How can I use my veteran preference?'

Veterans who are disabled and served on active duty during specified time periods or in military campaigns are entitled to preference over others in hiring, according to the Veterans' Preference Act of 1944.

"When applying for a merit promotion announcement, veterans can apply because of their status as a veteran," explained John Walker Jr, a human resources specialist with the Atlanta VA Medical Center. "Otherwise, the announcement may only be open to current federal civilian employees. The veteran still must meet the qualifications for the job.

Veteran preference comes into play when veterans apply for a position that is processed through a delegated examining unit (DEU).

"Those jobs are open to the public," Walker said. "After reviewing the qualifications, the DEU assigns points to that application. The veteran's preference gives those applications additional points, based on the disability rating."

Under the Veteran Recruitment Appointment, veterans may be appointed at various ranks within the general schedule or wage grade system, he said.

The online recruiting and application process can seem impersonal and foreign to some servicemembers. A job application is far different than the personnel action request veterans may have used on active duty. Reading the entire announcement, preparing the resume and answering the knowledge, skills and abilities [KSA] portion is the first part of job hunting.

"That's our hardest hurdle: self evaluation," said Dr. Annette Taylor, Regional VECS coordinator. "It's different from the care they received in uniform. In service, the servicemembers' reputation normally preceded them. After they were trained, their service records were screened to ensure the right person was prepared and selected for that job; then, he or she received orders for that assignment. We don't have that luxury here. Servicemembers have to learn to sell themselves on paper before the interview process can begin, and we are here to help."

Walker chimed in, "We operate on a merit system that says you have to be qualified before you can work at the VA. Having a job similar to what the duties require may not be enough. Having a veteran preference allows the application to be processed, but applicants still must meet the minimum qualification, have certifications and credentials."

Like most human resource personnel, Walker takes the time to thoroughly access an application packet, Taylor remarked. "Veterans sometimes feel frustrated," Walker said, "because they say they felt like a number and not a person during the application process. I don't want them to feel like that when applying at the VA. I take the one-on-

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Daughters, sons learn real-world tasks at hospital

The Atlanta VA Medical Center hosted 37 daughters and sons of its employees May 6. To start the day, the students were packed with motivational speeches, career advice and safety tips before the touring the Dental Clinic, Physical Therapy, Prosthetics and a visit with the hospital leadership staff.

The following are letters written to the director's staff by students who participated in the Bring Your Daughters and Sons to Work Day held May 6 at the Atlanta VA Medical Center.

Editor's note: The letters below are printed as received from a child's perspective.

Dear Sir:

Although we didn't have radiology on the tour schedule, Mr. [Orlando] Dunson, the Associate Director, gave me a tour of radiology. At first, I didn't even know what radiology meant. When we got there, there was some fascinating stuff like a patient's brain, heart and even toes. The second part was when we came in at the right moment when we saw a real patient going to the donut (a machine that scans your body) [a Magnetic Resonance Imaging or MRI] and we also saw all his body.

Before they put the patient in the donut, they had to give him a shot or IV for medical reasons.

In all, radiology was great and I'm thinking about majoring in that in college. If I am, I have to keep my grades up but that won't be hard because I have all 'As'.

-Landon Moore, 12 year old

Landon said in a separate note he also enjoyed the "fake eyes and legs," but what fascinated him the most was



Orthotist-prosthetists Mark DeMeza (left) holds a reference of center for Kelly Winter, who uses a bio-scanner camera to form or scan body features into a computer system; it is the initial process for creating a limb prosthesis. Student Landon Moore poses as the patient.

seeing "how the artificial teeth are made." Landon's favorite part was "making new friends and some girlfriends."

Dear Mr. Clark,

We wanted to thank you for letting us come to the VA hospital for bring your child to work day. We thought it was a great experience. It was a blast! Our favorite part was the prosthetics and the dental center. The prosthetics was about plastic body parts that are used to replace missing parts of your body. When your body breaks down, prosthetics replaces them. We saw fake legs, fake eyes and fake arms. It was cool that people have a choice.

The dental center showed us a set of dentures and the molding that they use.

The hospital is humongous and supports a lot of people.

Sincerely,

- Ian Miller and Antonio Bonton



Elijah Williams, a restoration clinician, demonstrates inserting the artificial eye into the orbital socket of a patient.



Anita Williams, a restoration clinician, explains the process of creating a prosthesis nose and lip to work-day participants.

Decatur CBOC pulls community together for Spring Fling



The Decatur Community Based Outpatient Clinic staff invited community and health service organizations to provide medical education and outreach programs for their patients May 1.

Nearly 200 veterans attended.



Above, Jatun Neal, a dietician at the Decatur Community Based Outpatient Clinic, provides nutritional information to Ben Daniel, an Army veteran living in Decatur. Center, Belinda Molina, a registered nurse explains blood pressure readings to Darell Bridges, an Air Force veteran of four years. Right, Gregory Studdard, a volunteer and local attorney who provides pro bono legal advice to veterans, advises Willie Jenkins on items to include in his will. Jenkins served 20 years in the Army.

Nurses continued from cover

ment to patient safety,” said Leake.

A nurse’s attitude and efforts make all the difference in the world to patients. The courage nurses display indicates they are not being discouraged by others who say ‘it’ can’t be done, Leake explained. Their enthusiasm signifies they enjoy what they do.

“The nurse that held my hand the first time I cried will always be a special person to me,” said one Vietnam veteran who served in the military. He wears his

service pins bravely, but doesn’t reveal his name for publication.

“I’ve been a patient here for more than four years and some days are better than others,” he revealed. “But, they always taken care of me here. Those pretty nurses always seem to listen. I can be a cry baby in my older, slower years, but I’d never say that out loud in front of my comrades. We were strong then and will always be,” the fragile elderly man said as he walked his

wheelchair down the hall toward patient pharmacy.

Nurses are accustomed to communicating with people in some of the most stressful situations imaginable, according to Leake. It depends on the purpose of dialogue – to provide care, hope and education.

“I’m proud of the service our nursing staff provides here,” Leake said. “They show their commitment to our veterans by the care they provide every day.”

Reminder

Voluntary Leave Transfer Program —

The following are approved participants in the VLTP and are eligible to receive annual leave donations.

Atlanta Vet Center-Anita Salamon.

Environmental Service-Cheyenne Christie.

Patient Care-Erma Boykin, Jason Hollis, Terri Moore

Pharmacy-Sharita Reese, Karonda Benton.

Extended Care- Tammy Terry.

Primary Care- Tomia Harmon, Dolores Wells, Shereta Jones.

Surgical Care - Karissa Bedi

Police Service - Bobby Keener, Keith Griffin

Information Technology - Faith Thompson

Health Administration - Larry Chivers

To make a leave donation, call Freida Philpotts at ext. 6306 or Marie Robinson at ext. 4376 for help completing form OF-630A.

Hotline — Did you know you have a direct line to

the Medical Center Director? Would you like to send an anonymous email to the Medical Center Director to share your concerns and suggestions?

To send an anonymous vista email: Access Code: ATL1997 Verify Code: ATLANTA1

Joint Commission — For patient safety concerns, contact Patient Safety at ext. 4823; to file a complaint, contact the Office of Inspector General at 800-488-8244 or VA IG at 53E/P.O. Box 50410, Washington, DC 20091 or contact Joint Commission at 800-994-6610 or via email at: complaint@jointcommission.org. No adverse actions are taken against those who report safety or quality of care concerns.

Dial-A-Prayer — VAMC’s Chaplain Service provides a Dial-A-Prayer service/ministry. Dial-A-Prayer is always available. If calling from an outside telephone, dial 404-321-6111, ext. 4161.



Elevator Safety Tips

Don't lose a limb trying to catch an elevator

How many times have you or someone else tried to hold the elevator by putting your hand between the closing doors? Can you imagine how it would feel if the sensor failed and the door continued closing? Are you quick enough to get your hand out of the way? Don't take that chance.

Here are some safety rules to follow:

When approaching the elevators:

- Know your destination.
- Look and listen for the signal announcing the car's arrival.

- Stand aside for exiting passengers. Wait for the next car if the arriving elevator is full.

- Don't try to stop the closing doors by putting your hands, feet, canes or anything between them. Wait for the next elevator.

- Take the stairs if there is an emergency, fire or other incident that could lead to a disruption in electrical service.

When entering and exiting elevators:

- Passengers who are nearest the doors should move carefully first.

- Assist disabled personnel when and if needed.

- Once on board, quickly press the button for your floor and move to the back of the car to make room for other passengers.

- Stand clear of the closing doors and keep clothes and carry-on objects away from the opening.

- Push and hold the "DOOR OPEN" button, if the doors need to be held open. Never use your hands or any object.

When riding on elevators:

- Stand away from the doors.

- Hold the hand rail, if you need to brace yourself.

- Pay attention to the floor indicators and be prepared to exit at your destination.

- If the doors do not open when the elevator stops, push the "DOOR OPEN" button before ringing the "ALARM" button or using the telephone or intercom to call for help.

- If the doors still don't open, call and wait until qualified personnel can assist you.

- Push or pull the ALARM button to call for assistance.

- Do not force-open the elevator doors.

- Be patient; help is on the way.



Heads Up ...

- All are invited to attend the Ground-Breaking Ceremony for the Patient Breezeway June 19 at 1 p.m. in the valet parking lot outside the Atlanta VA Medical Center.

A small reception will follow in the chapel.

- The next Georgia VA Southeast Network Stakeholders' meeting is scheduled for June 24 at 1 p.m. in the Pete Wheeler Auditorium.

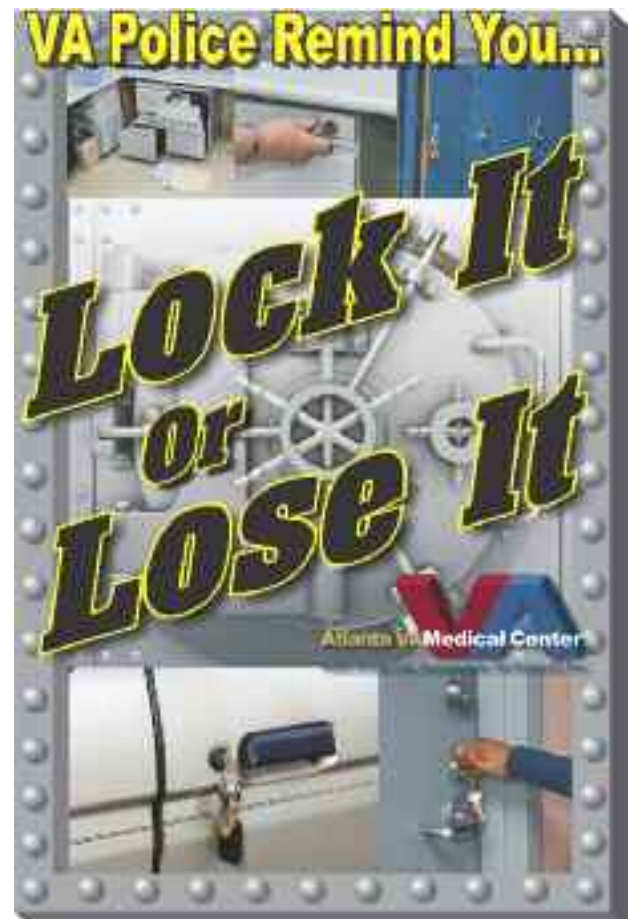
- The Prosthetics Services Line will host the next Director's Town Hall Meeting June 25 at 2 p.m. in the Pete Wheeler Auditorium. All are encouraged to attend.



My HealtheVet, is the Veteran Affairs' online Personal Health Record manager. It provides access to health information, links to Federal and VA benefits and resources, the Personal Health Journal and online VA prescription refill.

To register on MyHealtheVet, www.myhealth.va.gov, click on the "Register" button located in the right-hand column of home page.

For more information, send inquiries to Cynthia. Kenward@va.gov.



Disney celebrates military with free admission to parks

America's military personnel have a reason to celebrate at a Disney park: free multi-day admission to Disney's U.S. theme park.

"Disney's Armed Forces Salute" offers active and retired U.S. military personnel, including active and retired members of the U.S. Coast Guard and activated members of the National Guard or Reserves, can enjoy complimentary, multi-day admission into Disney's U.S. theme parks.

At Walt Disney World Resort in Florida, through Dec. 23, each active or retired member of the U.S. military may obtain one complimentary five-day "Disney's Armed Forces Salute" ticket with Park Hopper and Water Park Fun & More options. This ticket is valid for five days of admission into the four Walt Disney World theme parks,

plus a total of five visits to a choice of a Disney water park, DisneyQuest Indoor In-

teractive Theme Park or certain other attractions. During this offer period, active or retired U.S. military personnel may also make a one-time purchase of up to a maximum of five five-Day "Disney's Armed Forces Salute Companion" tickets (one theme park per day) for \$99 per ticket, plus tax, for family members (including spouse) or friends.

For information, call the Leisure Activities Center staff of Fort McPherson

at 404-464-4392 or 464-3677, or visit www.disney-world.com/military.



Law Enforcement

Job well done Law Enforcement officers!
They received Highly Satisfactory rating during a program inspection conducted by the Office of Law Enforcement Oversight and Criminal Investigation Division in April 2009.

VECS continued from page 4

one approach in helping them present the best packet possible."

It's an honorable act; however, with Atlanta housing nearly 300,000 applicants and sometimes half of those are veterans, time is the restraint. Veterans have a filter and resources with the VECS program.

"We help alleviate issues in getting the application through processing, so human resources can do its job for speedier placements," Taylor explained.

The VA is trying hard to make the transition from uniform to civilian service smooth. VECS personnel provide classes to active duty and reserve military units, Veteran Services Organizations, and any stakeholder who wishes to have information on career services for Department of Veterans Affairs career placement.

"We want to give veterans information about their benefits and resources even before the decision is made to leave the military," Taylor said.

Another frustration some veterans face is about having to relocate for the job.

"After moving their families during the years of service, veterans tend to want to get a job locally and settle down," Taylor said. But, sometimes the job they best qualify for is in another state that would require another move. Veterans have to be mobile, and the best way to determine if a job within the VA is a good fit is to volunteer there first."

Volunteerism helps give the applicant a glimpse of the environment and its diversity of patients including the cultures, disabilities and national origin.

"Sometimes the selection is about finding the right fit for the job," Taylor said. "Listening, communication, temperament and compassion play vital roles in working at the VA. Every candidate has to want to help veterans."

Veterans are encouraged to seek employment help before and during the transition phase.

"Come to us and use us as much as you can," said Taylor, who covers recruiting and coordination in Georgia, Florida, Alabama, South Carolina, Mississippi and Puerto Rico. "We are located throughout the country. We are here to help alleviate the cloudiness or perception that we as vets are not being fairly reviewed during the application process.

For more information on career opportunities in VA or to locate the regional coordinator in your area, visit www.va.gov/vecs or send an e-mail message to Dr. Taylor at Annette.Taylor@va.gov.

